



# **Commission on Children and Youth 2015-2016 Annual Report**

**Montgomery County, Maryland  
Department of Health and Human Services**

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November 9, 2016

The Honorable Isiah Leggett  
Montgomery County Executive

The Honorable Nancy Floreen, President  
Montgomery County Council

The Honorable Michael A. Durso, President  
Montgomery County Board of Education

Uma Ahluwalia, Director  
Montgomery County Department of Health  
and Human Services

Citizens of Montgomery County

Dear Mr. Leggett, Ms. Floreen, Mr. Durso, Ms. Ahluwalia and Citizens of Montgomery County,

**The Montgomery County Commission on Children and Youth (CCY) is pleased to present its 2015-2016 Annual Report.**

The Commission subcommittees for 2015-2016 targeted two topics that were generated by Commission members during the 2015 planning retreat. The rise in youth homelessness and local initiatives for My Brother's Keeper were researched, examined, and discussed throughout the 2015-2016 Commission year.

Throughout the year, the CCY leveraged its advisory authority to support policy and budget decisions that promote the safety and well-being of the County's children and youth and worked to ensure that all young people have access to successful futures. We presented testimony to the County Executive, County Council, Board of Education, and Department of Health and Human Services advocating for critical youth-serving programs that provide children and youth an opportunity to realize their full potential and become contributing, productive adults.

CCY has also continued its important work in the community this year. The 9<sup>th</sup> Annual *Youth Having a Voice Roundtable* provided an opportunity for County leaders to hear from the community's youth and for the CCY to gather information from youth that defines the Commission's work for the year. This year, the youth focused on the impact of homelessness on youth and the concepts of My Brother's Keeper and other youth initiatives within Montgomery County. Additionally, the CCY sponsored the 30th Annual Dr. Nancy Dworkin Outstanding Service to Youth Awards Ceremony to honor individuals, organizations, businesses and youth honoree whose dedication, vision and service to children and youth have made an impact on the lives of others. Finally, one of our favorite collaborations continued to be sponsoring a cookie stand during the Tree House Child Assessment Center's annual Tour de Cookie event.

The CCY is committed to its mission and appreciates your support of our efforts. We look forward to working with you again this year. Please feel free to contact CCY to inform us about how we may best support your efforts and partner with you to benefit the County's children and youth

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Dana Bell".

Dana Bell, LCSW-C  
Chair

## Mission

The Commission on Children and Youth promotes the well-being of Montgomery County's children, youth, and families so that all young people may realize their full potential and become contributing, productive adults.

The Commission advances its mission by: (1) identifying the needs of young people and their families, and the groups and agencies that serve them; (2) informing and advising the County Executive, the County Council, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), the Board of Education (BOE), and the community at large; (3) recommending policies, programs, funding, and legislative priorities; and (4) affirming the needs, aspirations, and achievements of all the County's young people.

## Structure

The scope of issues and priorities the Commission can address is broad and far-reaching. In order to focus its work, the Commission holds an annual strategic planning retreat every June and selects priority issues for the year. Sub-committees are formed around the selected priorities.

In 2015-2016, the Commission elected to prioritize:

- **Homelessness and Youth:** Examine the causes of homelessness and the impact it has on the youth in Montgomery County.
- **My Brother's Keeper:** Review existing local initiatives and reports on My Brother's Keeper and opportunity youth. Analyze, meet with stakeholders and prioritize recommendations to the County.

The Commission hosts two major community events each year: the Youth Having a Voice Roundtable, which allows the Commission, public officials, and the larger community to learn more about the knowledge and opinions of Montgomery County youth, and the Dr. Nancy Dworkin Outstanding Service to Youth Awards, which honors individuals and organizations that provide extraordinary service to the children and youth of our community.

## Meetings

The Commission and its sub-committees meet on the second Wednesday of the month from 7:00 PM to 9:00 PM. The youth commissioners participate in a Youth Leadership Committee from 6:00 PM to 7:00 PM on the same evening. Meetings are generally held at the Early Childhood Training Center, 1401 Rockville Pike, Rockville. Meetings are open to the public.



The CCY has 27 positions including one representative from the public school system; one representative from a private school in the County; one representative from the Montgomery County Department of Recreation; and two representatives from the Department of Health and Human Services. The remaining 22 members are equally divided among individuals with recent experience with agencies providing services to children and youth; youth and young adults; and parents.

## **Youth Representatives**

Ethan Chen  
Sareana Kimia  
Howard Nicholson, III  
Bobbi Sherman

## **Parent Representatives**

Cecily Darden Adams  
Gina Brown  
Stuart Grossman  
Lindsay Hoffman  
Nora Ludden  
Dr. Angela Mickalide

## **Private Agency Representatives**

Shari Argue, Lourie Center, Early Head Start  
  
Dana Bell, Phillips School – Laurel  
  
Carson Henry, YMCA Youth & Family Services  
  
Nancy Kaplan, Private Nursery School Community  
  
Elizabeth McGlynn, Girls on the Run of Montgomery County, MD  
  
Roberta Rinker, Greentree Adolescent Program, National Center for  
Children and Families

## **Public Agency Representatives**

Adriane Clutter, Montgomery County Department of Recreation  
  
A.Thomas Grazio, MCDHHS, Child Welfare Services  
  
Tamara Niedomanski, Montgomery County Public Schools  
  
Beka Urgessa, MCDHHS, School Health Services

## **Staff**

Erin Stillwell, Program Manager  
Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services

## RECOMMENDATION #1

**Create a more centralized outreach plan to capture data on the number of youth who are homeless in Montgomery County as well as work towards establishing a Re-Engagement Center to provide youth who are homeless and disconnected a single-entry point to receive supportive services.**

Anecdotal stories among Commissioners have been on the rise regarding encounters with youth who are homeless in Montgomery County. Compounded with a robust discussion at a recent Youth Having a Voice Roundtable, the Commission felt compelled to explore this issue more deeply.

To learn more about the scope of youth homelessness, and how the county is addressing it, the Commission connected with over 14 agencies and organizations, ranging from Montgomery County Police Department to the National Center for Children and Families. We learned that these entities:

1. are seeing a rise in youth homelessness,
2. are not tracking data so the true scope of the problem remains unknown,
3. are not using a consistent definition of “homelessness,”
4. are of the belief that this will be a difficult group to census because youth are creative and resilient in finding places to sleep each night, and
5. do not have access to sufficient funding/resources to adequately address the problem.

To that end, the Commission is concerned that homeless and disconnected youth ages 16-24 remain invisible, uncouned, and at risk of dire short- and long-term consequences. These youth are at greater risk of being targeted for gangs and human trafficking and, statistically, once they adjust to the unpredictability of homelessness, they have trouble readjusting to structured environments.

The County has no centralized outreach plan for youth who are homeless and no organized collection of data. Therefore, we submit the following recommendations:

1. **Create a centralized system to capture data**
  - a. Many government agencies and non-profit entities come into contact with this population but there is no coordinated effort to census homeless youth.
  - b. These youth are resilient and smart – they “couch-surf” and find other ways to survive so they will not appear during traditional “point in time counts” and will actively avoid other efforts for identification. Montgomery County should join other nearby jurisdictions in focusing on a Youth-only Count.
  - c. This system will also be useful when targeting the reasons these youth are homeless to begin with.
2. **Youth REACH MD (Reach Out, Engage, Assist and Count to end homelessness)**
  - a. Youth REACH MD is a project established by the Maryland General Assembly in 2014 and has tasked the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development with obtaining accurate, detailed information on the number, characteristics, and needs of unaccompanied homeless youth in Maryland.
  - b. Montgomery County has not yet participated in this program and should make every effort to be part of this important opportunity for a comprehensive assessment of our needs and service gaps.
3. **Work toward establishing a drop-in re-engagement center to give youth a safe space**

## RECOMMENDATION #2

**Ensure that Montgomery County invests in high quality, evidence-based mentoring and outreach programs for youth. Mobilize youth-serving agencies to work towards a common goal by creating a collaborative process to promote the coordination of services and the exchange of data.**

In 2014, President Obama launched the My Brother's Keeper (MBK) Task force with the goal of identifying and advancing strategies to support young men of color suffering from opportunity gaps across the country. In doing so, he issued a challenge to local communities to get involved in the movement. Montgomery County heeded the call and established a local steering committee and convened various events including a Teen Summit and a Day of Action.

The Commission, however, has heard from residents who do not feel as connected to or informed about this initiative. Therefore, the Committee adopted the MBK priority of "reviewing existing local initiatives and reports on My Brother's Keeper and opportunity youth; analyzing, meeting with stakeholders and prioritizing recommendations to the county." During the course of their work, the Committee reviewed the historical results of Youth Having a Voice Roundtables, where these issues have arisen over time. They also attended MBK-related events, audited mentoring programs in the county and looked at other work in the coordinated youth services space. In doing their research, the Committee identified multiple gaps, including:

- 1) A disconnect in organizations focused on prevention-based work vs. those focused on intervention work
- 2) A concern among non-profit agencies when trying to meet transportation and facility use needs
- 3) Students wanting more trusting relationship with staff and faculty and schools

Based on this research, the Commission submits the following recommendations:

- 1) **The County must invest in high quality evidence-based mentoring programs. We support the work of the Montgomery County Collaboration Council in this area.**
- 2) **The County must better coordinate services for young people. Our community is lucky to have so many youth-serving agencies and organizations; however, they operate too independently and should all be working toward the same goals. Similarly, these agencies and organizations must be encouraged to share data.**
- 3) **The County must support integrated school supports that use peer mentors successfully, especially with minority students.**

## CCY Activities

### GUEST SPEAKERS AND PRESENTATIONS

- Full Commission/Homeless Youth Committee: Detective Matthew Vendemio, Montgomery County Police Department, discussed his professional experiences working with homeless populations in Montgomery County. Detective Vendemio also attended the Homeless Youth Committee to discuss how homelessness and criminal activity impact youth in Montgomery County (March 9, 2016).
- Full Commission: Elijah Wheeler, Social Justice Program Director, Montgomery County Collaboration Council for Children, Youth and Families, spoke about the creation of the My Brother's Keeper initiative and the action plan being developed to benefit young people of color in Montgomery County (April 13, 2016).
- My Brother's Keeper Committee: Elijah Wheeler was joined by Mr. Otto Perez and Ms. Laura Brown, YMCA Youth Links Mentoring Program, for a more extensive discussion about the role of mentoring at-risk youth in Montgomery County (April 13, 2016).
- Youth members of the Commission report on Hot Topics at every Commission meeting to help adult commissioner become aware of issues impacting children and youth in Montgomery County.

## CCY Activities continued

### TESTIMONY AND CORRESPONDENCE

- Attended and presented priorities and updates at Quarterly Meetings with the Director of Health and Human Services (2015-2016).
- Participated in the County Executive's annual meeting with Boards, Committees and Commissions (March 29, 2016).
- Attended the County Executive's HHS Briefing on FY17 Recommended Operating Budget (March 22, 2016).



*Tour De Cookie Stand, May 7, 2016, Poplar Grove Baptist Church*

## Youth Having a Voice Roundtable December 9, 2015

The Commission hosted its 9<sup>th</sup> annual ***Youth Having a Voice Roundtable*** on December 9, 2015 at the National Center for Children and Families in Bethesda. Approximately 15 teens from various high schools throughout the County joined us for a dynamic discussion. This year the conversation focused on two key topics associated with CCY priorities: the impact of homelessness on youth and the concepts of My Brother's Keeper and other youth initiatives in Montgomery County.

The youth commissioners developed the questions for the Roundtable at their leadership committee meeting. The questions were then posed to the youth participants and their honest feedback was encouraged. Responses from the youth participants were both informative and reflective. Their insight has the power to provide the adults in the room and at MCPS and other schools and programs for youth insights into youth experiences in Montgomery County. An overview of the discussion follows:

### **Youth and Homelessness**

**Question 1:** *If you were kicked out of your house would you have a safe place to go?*

#### **Youth Responses:**

- I would go to a best friend and/or family member
- I would go to a friend as I do not have family members in the area
- I would feel uncomfortable asking for help and would not know how to deal with being homeless based on my customs
- I would have to go to different places because of being undocumented
- I would try to find a safe and stable place to go
- I would go to a church or organization for help
- I would talk to a trusted friend or someone who can give guidance without being judgmental

**Question 2:** *What might cause young people to become homeless?*

#### **Youth Responses:**

- Most homeless youth do not have family support
- Homeless parents cannot take care of family due to insufficient income
- Drugs and alcohol are significant factors for homeless
- Some youth become homeless because they have been kicked out by their parents



## Youth Having a Voice Roundtable continued

### Youth and Homelessness (continued):

**Question 3:** *If you were homeless, would you know what resources are available?*

**Youth Responses:**

- I would seek resources from the school counselor's office
- I would check with churches for help
- Youth quote: "When I was 15 years of age and a 9<sup>th</sup> grader, I had to move out of my parent's home. It was not due to drugs/alcohol or being a bad kid. It was because my parent and I did not have a good relationship."
- It is not easy to approach some counselors. I would try to do things without help of a counselor because some of them are not trustworthy.

**Question 4:** *If you were homeless, what would your needs be?*

**Youth Responses:**

- I would need food and shelter.
- I would like the support of someone who is concerned about my education and encourage me to stay in school.
- I would want someone who can be trusted.
- I would like an adult who is supportive and able to provide guidance.
- I would like a support system to be available to listen to my concerns and not judge me.
- I would like to have an open environment to get documented and enable my parents to come to USA so I can have a support system.
- I would like someone to encourage me and guide me through the process to find shelter.

# Youth Having a Voice Roundtable continued

## Youth and Homelessness (continued):

**Question 5:** *Would you feel comfortable telling others about your situation? Who might you go to at school?*

### Youth Responses:

- I would tell my friends and counselor.
- I would not go to counselor, just try to work things out on my own.
- I would be too embarrassed to let someone know that I am homeless.
- I would not want sympathy because others will look down on you.
- I would talk to friends who have been homeless and use their information to motivate me to get through the process.
- I almost got kicked out of school, I was uncomfortable and embarrassed to talk with counselor about being homeless; however, the counselor helped me find programs and resources for homeless youth.

**Question 6:** *Have you ever known of any children/youth that have been homeless?*

### Youth Responses:

- I have a friend whose mother took her out of school and allowed her boyfriend to live in the same household. Recently, the mother kicked the daughter and boyfriend out. The daughter is pregnant and has been abused by her father. The daughter and boyfriend are now living in a cheap hotel.
- The family is homeless even with the mother working three jobs. She and mother live with family members and the sister is living with the father.
- The mother had three jobs as a waitress, but she is now unemployed living in a hotel. There were times that children could not get to school. They are now living in a cheap apartment for abused women.
- I have a desire to help homeless youth but parents are very strict about my contacts.
- Although parents may be strict, it is always good to give advice and encourage homeless youth to seek help from school counselor.
- I know of a case where the sister is taking care of her siblings.
- Peer of a homeless girl asked her mother to allow her homeless friend to stay with them for a couple of weeks. Family made arrangements by moving brothers to one room to allow homeless girl to stay with them. Family took homeless girl to church with them and directed her to an outreach center for shelter. Homeless girl is now on track to graduate from high school.



# Youth Having a Voice Roundtable continued

## My Brother's Keeper and other local initiatives

**Question 1:** *Unity Christian Fellowship (UCF) offers a youth initiative entitled the Game Changers Program. Do you have access to any programs like that? Where/with whom?*

### **Youth Responses:**

- Walter Johnson High School will offer a session on life skills. They will teach life skills such as: handshaking, interviewing, repairing cars, financing, and proper dress attire. There will be guest speakers who will speak about some of their past hardships and are now thriving in their community.
- There is a program called ACE that helps students aspiring to go to college.
- Upper Bound is a program offered to students to improve SAT /ACT scores. Students must stay on campus for this summer program.

**Question 2:** *Are these programs sufficient? (Are they making a difference?)*

### **Youth Responses:**

- Many programs are sufficient, but students need to be made aware of these programs. Many homeless students do not know about these programs. Many are afraid to reach out for several reasons – lack of trust, being undocumented, or being looked down upon. One student noted that she was once friendly with a bad group of friends and her grades were horrible. After becoming a member of an organization that supports life skill opportunities she is a better student. She was required to sign contract with this organization vowing to be a better student. As a result, she has acquired leadership skills and now serves as president of the organization.
- Leadership roles have given me a desire to further my education.
- The GAP (Greentree Adolescent Program) helped me to get job as an undocumented youth. I also attend life skill sessions two times per week.
- My grades have improved, and I now have scholarship to Montgomery Community College.

## Youth Having a Voice Roundtable *Continued*

### My Brother's Keeper and other local initiatives (continued):

**Question 3:** *If these programs are not sufficient, what other services to young people need to plan for their future?*

#### **Youth Responses:**

- Programs that allow students to network and connect with organizations to ensure stability in the home.
- Schools should be flexible transporting students to and from school. If a student does not participate in sports, a bus is not available for participation in other programs. Many students have to wait a long time to get bus or they walk several blocks to get bus. In some cases, there are no paved sidewalks making it difficult for walking.
- Some programs are close-knit and should be expanded. For example, announcements should go out regularly so students are aware of vacancies when students graduate.

**Question 4:** *How much of a duty do adults have to youth to keep their lives on track? How much should adults control a youth's decision about their future?*

#### **Youth Responses:**

- Parents owe their children the right amount of intervention. Parents should take care of their children 100 percent. One student noted that she would never bring a child into this world without being a responsible parent.
- Question was asked – do teachers really care about students? Many students felt that some teachers were not really connected to students.
- Students want teachers to be more supportive after school and during lunch time.
- One teacher gave an assignment to improve grades and students did not see any results of the additional assignment. Students felt this was a broken promise on the teacher's part and gave the impression of being unsupportive to students.
- Teachers need to be sensitive to family issues and not overload students with lots of homework.
- Counselors/teachers should motivate students to start in 9<sup>th</sup> grade planning their college career rather than waiting until 11<sup>th</sup> grade. It is usually too late by 11<sup>th</sup> grade to apply for scholarships.
- A few students noted that some teachers go the extra mile helping them to get on the right track.
- Parents should be involved but not constantly nagging.

## Youth Having a Voice Roundtable *Continued*

### My Brother's Keeper and other local initiatives (continued):

**Question 4 (continued):** *How much of a duty do adults have to youth to keep their lives on track? How much should adults control a youth's decision about their future?*

### **Youth Responses (continued)**

- Schools have a morning show that announce events/activities; however, students felt that some announcements are important and some are not. Also, many students do not pay attention to the announcements.
- Peer tutoring is one of the announcements during the morning show; however, some students are not interested because of the stigma this places on students. It was noted that peer tutoring may be an embarrassment for some especially when the level of knowledge is not the same. They prefer tutoring from an adult rather than a peer.
- The need to have an adult advocate like his mother.
- Students sometimes do not listen to teachers unless parents are involved.

## Dr. Nancy Dworkin Outstanding Service to Youth Awards Ceremony May 16, 2016

The Montgomery County Commission on Children and Youth held its 30<sup>th</sup> Annual Dr. Nancy Dworkin Outstanding Service to Youth Awards Ceremony on Monday, May 16, 2016 at the Gilchrist Hall Auditorium on the campus of Johns Hopkins University in Rockville. The Commission was extremely honored to have Dr. Dworkin's family in attendance to celebrate the 30<sup>th</sup> year of the award. The energized spirit of the evening was exemplified by the electrifying musical performance provided by the all youth band, "Throwing Wrenches."

The award is named in honor of Dr. Nancy Dworkin, past chairperson for the Commission on Children and Youth who passed award in 1987. Dr. Dworkin was the Director of the Center for Unique Learners, a Rockville based school for children with learning disabilities. Her upbeat instructional philosophy focused on "teaching to strength" and encouraging all students to develop skills that would maximize their potential. Dr. Dworkin's philosophy is echoed in the Commission's purpose for establishing this Awards Program—encouraging each person to reach their own potential for providing service to others.

To honor 30 years of this commemorative event, the Commission created a special award entitled the "Butterfly Award." The butterfly, one of Dr. Dworkin's favorite symbols, was adopted from one of her student's drawings. The image of the butterfly represents the freedom to go beyond artificial barriers and encourage others to recognize and explore their individual capabilities and strengths.



*Dr. Dworkin's children, Tamara Dworkin, Amram Dworkin and Kolev Dworkin, grandchildren, along with other family members and friends celebrate the evening*

Dr. Nancy Dworkin Outstanding Service to  
Youth Awards Ceremony  
Award Recipients



YOUTH  
AWARD

PATRICK  
O'HANLON

ORGANIZATION  
AWARD

MARYLAND  
MULTICULTURAL  
YOUTH CENTERS





Dr. Nancy Dworkin Outstanding Service to  
Youth Awards Ceremony  
Award Recipients



SERVICE  
PROVIDER  
AWARD

MAYRA RONDON  
TINEO

VOLUNTEER  
AWARD

WILLIAM  
TORREY



Dr. Nancy Dworkin Outstanding Service to  
Youth Awards Ceremony  
Award Recipients



CHILD  
ADVOCATE  
AWARD

DR. LARRY  
EPP

BUSINESS  
AWARD

DELOITTE  
CONSULTING





## Dr. Nancy Dworkin Outstanding Service to Youth Awards Ceremony Award Recipients

### THE BUTTERFLY AWARD



### THE STREET OUTREACH NETWORK





# The CCY at Work



*Photos graciously provided by Mr. John Leonard*

## CCY Priorities 2016-2017

Our top priority is to support policy and budget decisions that promote the safety and well-being of children and youth, and, furthermore, work to ensure children and youth have access to successful futures.

The Commission is working to affirm the needs, aspirations, and achievements of all of the County's young people through these two priorities.

### Priority 1:

The Commission is concerned about the increase in prescription opioid and heroin abuse by youth in Montgomery County. We intend to examine the factors influencing this problem and the impact it is having on youth and family members in our community. Recognizing that many organizations are working on these issues, we plan to collaborate broadly and engage in a public awareness campaign targeted at youth.

### Priority 2:

The Commission is committed to its mission of informing and advising County officials. To become more effective in this work, we intend to reevaluate our internal infrastructure, create processes to better influence County policies and budget, and contact and/or identify appropriate actors/organizations to enact recommendations submitted in the Commission's annual reports(s) over the past five years. Therefore, we will also be revisiting past priorities and following-up on recommendations that have not yet been implemented.



## **Commission on Children and Youth 2015-2016 Annual Report**

**Isiah Leggett, County Executive  
Uma S. Ahluwalia, Director of Health and Human Services  
JoAnn Barnes, Chief, Children Youth and Family Services**

**Montgomery County Department of Health and Human  
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**Language translation and alternative formats of this report are available upon request.  
For additional information on the Commission, please call or write at the address and  
telephone numbers listed above.**

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the admission or access to its programs and services**